



UNDER DEVELOPMENT

After he has checked all his emails using somebody else's WiFi connection, David Robinson is horrified to discover that he has some work to do. Still, at least he's able to do it from a bar in the south of France

ILLUSTRATION: KEVIN FEBRUARY

I'm writing this in 35° heat in the south of France. The journey here was a good test for Mrs R's birthday present, which was a sat-nav system. Navigation has never been one of her stronger points, and she's been hankering after one for a while, having borrowed one for a journey a couple of years back. On that occasion she was going to a Sage developers' conference in Newcastle and decided to go the pretty route via

Malton, Thirsk and the A19. The problem then was that the infamous Sutton Bank hill was closed for road works and the sat-nav system threw a "hissy fit" (her words) when she followed the marked diversion. Still, sat-nav was what she wanted, so that's what she got.

One option was to buy software, a GPS aerial and a car power supply then use the Fujitsu Loox 710 PDA I'm no longer using as a host. The snag

with this kind of arrangement is that it's not very neat and there are wires everywhere. I was much more impressed with the all-in-one type of unit sold by TomTom and, after a web search, sought advice from Total PDA (www.totalpda.com), who talked me through the various options. The TomTom unit fitted the bill very well but adding European maps made the cost unattractive, especially as Total PDA had a special deal on a Nav-Man

510 Gold that came with detailed continental maps included, so we settled on that. Essentially it's a PDA unit with built-in GPS antenna and can be used in a car, on foot or, importantly for me, on a motorcycle.

So far we've had no 'hissy fits' from it, despite me deliberately ignoring the voice directions because I know a better route. And, for the first time ever, we got out of Nice without getting lost.

RUN FOR THE MONEY

I like to run and, like many runners, I also like to know how I'm performing. A stopwatch is fine but it leaves out one important detail, which is the distance covered in the recorded time. Pedometers are OK, I suppose, but not very accurate.

A short while ago Mrs R bought me a Timex system, which includes a fancy watch and a pod thing that straps to your arm. The pod contains a GPS receiver that transmits time and distance data to the watch, which, in turn, uses that to show information such as average speed, current speed, distance covered and so on. The watch has an Ironman Triathlon logo although, with the amount of French



bread I've eaten with Mrs R's raspberry jam on it, I think Puttyman might be a better description for me right now.

If you're really obsessed with the numbers, Timex also provides a data recording unit for an extra £50, which saves the time and distance data at roughly 10-second intervals. You can then download the data for the run into the provided software that turns it all into graphs so you can see exactly what you're doing. The whole lot includes a heart-rate sensor and costs under £200. If you're not bothered about the data recording, NavMan (www.navman.com) does a single unit called a Sport-Tool that you wear on your wrist and provides similar time and distance stuff for under £100.

Sometimes I run with Maurice, a French guy who stays nearby. He's been telling me that a run we do regularly is almost exactly 7km and he's really proud that he's been doing it in 30 minutes, which means an average speed of 14 kilometres per hour – not bad when you're heading for 60. Sadly for Maurice, my unit says the run is 5.9km.

I had further bad news for him, too. He's got a new digital camera and made a big point of telling me that it has an eight-megapixel resolution. How big is my two-year-old Fujitsu SP602? Well, it's only six megapixels at best, although I usually take most pictures at three as they're easily good enough for most purposes. "Pah!" says Maurice, in a fit of one-upmanship. I think he's still upset at us getting the Olympics.

However, he says the pictures look much better on the camera LCD than on his computer. I look at some of the files and see that they're only around 50KB, which would indicate that although his camera will take pictures at eight megapixels, he's got it set for 640x480 resolution. What's the French for RTFM?

WIFI CHOICE

Despite having bad-mouthed the Fujitsu Loox I've still brought it with me, mainly in the vain hope that I'd find a WiFi connection for collecting email, although I expected to have to use the awful 'terminal' in the bar. On the second day of the holiday, Mrs R and I went for a meal at La Louisianne in Le Lavandou – they do a great bourride, three sorts of fish in a cream sauce – and on the wall I noticed a very small sign that simply read 'WiFi Point'. The next evening I took a walk and sat outside with the Loox, and it found a choice of three services. One, called WeSea, wanted 59 euros (around £40) for three hours' access – and you had to use it or lose it within three days.

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Blakey, who considers himself a graphics buff (he designs 3D objects in his spare time), took one look at the cover and thickness of this book and pronounced it "simplistic". In a geeky techno sense, he's right. In a 'how do I get it to look right?' sense, he couldn't be more wrong.

We live in a world where most of us have easy access to reasonably cheap but good software to create

graphic images. And with colour laser printers at such a low price (see last month's Labs review for some great examples), any small business can have a stab at producing their own sales materials, cards, product instructions and so on. Sadly, the results often look like a dog's breakfast

– not because the print quality is bad, but because the user hasn't the faintest idea of how to design a decent piece of print work.

Author John McWade gets the point across using makeover examples. Some of the originals weren't bad – better than most amateur efforts – but every one looked better after his redesign. He explains the reason for each change and also explores some alternatives. If you were to pay a professional design consultant for advice of this quality, it would cost you fortune.

Among the projects he examines are newsletters, stationery, press ads, brochures, product instructions and logos. If you fancy trying your hand at producing your own printed material for a club or small business and have no formal training in graphic design, this book is invaluable.

Next up was Bormes WiFi, but I couldn't find out how much it charges as its site link wouldn't move to the charges page using Internet Explorer for Pocket PC. Finally, there was a point simply labelled Netgear. Bingo! But was it secure? A quick attempt to connect to the net was a success, and I dealt with all my mail for free.

I tried the same trick at lunchtime two days later, but

unless you give it another reset poke first.

So I RTFM and the help file. Zilch. There's advice on really useful stuff such as how to play Solitaire, but nothing that helps diagnose what's going on. I think a hard reset (ie, back to factory defaults) might help, but can't find anything on how to do that either. Despite lots of experimentation, nothing works.

set off in search of an alternative. We found another point in the Port de Bormes (a large marina) that offered the Bormes service I could not access before. However, as we were using a regular XP copy of Internet Explorer this time, we were able to open the charges page. The Bormes service is far more reasonable at 20 euros (around £13) for two hours and, unlike WeSea, you can use the time over a three-week period. We pay by credit card and get connected.

The next problem was that we didn't know how long the job would take and the laptop had about half an hour left on the battery. So we go into a bar, sit at a table near a power socket and order two beers. We asked to use the plug. Fortunately, we had eaten in the restaurant the night before and, unusually for a Yorkshireman, left a decent tip – so the answer was yes. Making the connection to the client's office was *un morceau de gateaux* and we soon located the offending file, which wasn't lost but corrupted. We just about used up the two hours sorting out the file but, let's face it, the alternative – drive to Nice airport, easyJet, drive to client's office then reverse the process – was hardly attractive. Besides, we got to drink cold beer while we were working – not because we wanted to, of course, but just to get the barman to let us stay! ☺

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Monsieur Netgear was nowhere to be found. But I returned to the same spot that evening and the Netgear router was back on again – it looked like the guy was there (wherever 'there' is) only in the evening and turned everything off when absent. No consideration, these French. So I dealt with my emails once more.

As La Louisianne was on the route of my morning run, it seemed easier if I packed the Loox into a runner's belt pack and took a break on the return leg to see if Netgear was available first thing in the morning. It was, so I asked the Loox to connect. It said "connecting". And it carried on saying "connecting", but nothing happened. I tried a reset by poking the stylus into a small hole and turned on the WiFi; this time, I couldn't access any of the network configuration screens, which meant I couldn't even access the 'connect' screen. What's more, once the WiFi's turned on, you can't turn off the power on the Loox

A few days later we collected Alan, my daughter and grandchildren from Nice airport. Alan had brought his laptop complete with WiFi interface. We tried connecting to Netgear and that still worked fine both with the laptop and his Dell Axim PDA, so I don't think the Loox problem was anything Netgear's system did to it.

ONE FOR THE ROAD

Two days later, we got a call from the office saying that a major customer in the south of England had lost an important data file and the guys in the office couldn't find a backup. The file was one of the main elements in a mission-critical database, and they couldn't sell anything without it. With an internet connection, we could connect to the office and, from there, to the client system to try and fix it. The problem was that Mr Netgear would probably have turned his router off as usual, so Alan, the laptop and I

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